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THE STRUCTURE OF EZRA-NEHEMIAH AND THE INTEGRITY OF THE BOOK

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Debates about the integrity of Ezra-Nehemiah and its relation to Chronicles continue. On the one hand, the pervasive view for the past 150 years has been that Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles form a single book, authored by the Chronicler.[1] This theory had been challenged in recent decades by the pioneering work of S. Japhet, a challenge corroborated also by H. G. M. Williamson and others.[2] Nevertheless, a lively discussion concerning the relation of Ezra-Nehemiah to Chronicles persists and the issues seem far from settled.[3]

On the other hand, Ezra-Nehemiah is commonly divided into two distinct books, Ezra and Nehemiah. These two are printed separately in nearly all modern translations of the Bible even though such division runs counter to the earliest LXX manuscripts and the MT, where Ezra-Nehemiah appears as a single work.[4] Ezra-Nehemiah thus receives a peculiar treatment and appears to have indeterminate boundaries.

[1] The theory of common authorship for Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles was set forth by L. Zunz, "Dibre hajamim oder Bücher der Chronik," *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden, historisch entwickelt* (Berlin: Louis Lamm, 1832, 1919 ed.) 12–34. This seminal article quickly established the unity of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah as the normative view. As H. G. M. Williamson observes, "Although there had been some who earlier hinted at this idea, it was in 1832 that L. Zunz set out the evidence which, with later additions and refinements, convinced the overwhelming majority of scholars. Confirmation of this statement may be found by reference to virtually any modern commentary or introduction written from that time down to the present" (*Israel in the Books of Chronicles* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977] 5).

[2] Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1977) [Hebrew]; see also idem, "The Supposed Common Authorship of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah Investigated Anew," *VT* 18 (1968) 330–71; Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles*, esp. pp. 1–70.

[3] Note, for example, the special "Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah Consultation" at the Annual Meeting of SBL in Atlanta in 1986, devoted to the question of the relation between Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles: "The Unity and Extent of the Chronicler's Work" with P. R. Ackroyd, S. Japhet, and B. Halpern representing different positions.

[4] The division into Ezra and Nehemiah is first attested by Origen (see Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.2) and was later accepted by the Vulgate. For a recent discussion of this development, see H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (Word Biblical Commentary, 16; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985) xxi–xxiii.

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The structure of Ezra-Nehemiah becomes a pivotal issue in attempting to respond to the dual pull of scholarly debates: the drive to submerge Ezra-Nehemiah in Chronicles or to dissect it into Ezra and Nehemiah. Yet little progress has been made in clarifying such a structure. Although it is no longer fashionable to recompose Ezra-Nehemiah into a presumed, pristine "original," as L. W. Batten, for example, had done,[5] very few scholars explain or even describe the present form of the book. Most commentaries on Ezra-Nehemiah simply follow the sequence of chapters in the book with but an occasional glance at what the overall design might be. They describe some of the major blocks in terms of literary or historical categories, noting the confusing peculiarities in the book (such as the dispersion of the Ezra material in the Nehemiah memoirs) without coming to conclusions about the nature of the present composition of the book.

Notable exceptions to these general tendencies are B. S. Childs and Japhet.[6] Each, in a brief study of Ezra-Nehemiah, proposes in passing an overall structure and alludes to an organizing principle. The very brevity of their studies and the absence of developed details heighten rather than diminish the need for an analysis of the structure of the book.

This paper uses literary tools to explicate Ezra-Nehemiah's distinctive structure and point of view by focusing on one aspect of Ezra-Nehemiah, namely, the lists of people. I intend to show how these lists, often considered one of Ezra-Nehemiah's most exasperating features, are in fact an important key to the structure and hence the meaning of Ezra-Nehemiah. The lists, I argue, shape the book, affirm its integrity, and help differentiate Ezra-Nehemiah from Chronicles. They also express one of Ezra-Nehemiah's major themes, that is, the shift away from individual heroes to the centrality of the people as a whole.

My method is literary in adhering to the kinds of criteria that critics such as R. Alter, A. Berlin, and M. Sternberg have used for other biblical narratives.[7] My text is the MT, wherein Ezra-Nehemiah appears as a single book, as the masoretic notations indicate. In the MT, Ezra-Nehemiah is also separate from Chronicles, which follows it.[8] Although my paper thus

[5] Batten, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (ICC; New York: Scribner, 1913).

[6] B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 624–38; S. Japhet, "Biblical Historiography in the Persian Period," in *World History of the Jewish People* (ed. H. Tadmor and I. Ephal; Jerusalem: Alexander Pelei, 1983) 6. 176–88; see esp. pp. 178–79 [Hebrew].

[7] R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983); M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

[8] The ancient manuscripts of the LXX and the oldest extant Hebrew manuscripts unanimously attest the unity of Ezra-Nehemiah on the one hand and its separation from Chronicles on the other. See, e.g., Codex Alexandrinus and the Aleppo Codex.

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presupposes—and therefore cannot also claim to prove—the integrity of Ezra-Nehemiah and its separateness from Chronicles, it nevertheless contributes to that discussion: It presents a particular structure which accounts for Ezra-Nehemiah's peculiarities, a structure that is independent from that of Chronicles. In so doing, the paper illustrates a coherence to Ezra-Nehemiah that renders a connection to Chronicles unnecessary and less plausible.

I

The predominance of lists constitutes one of Ezra-Nehemiah's most familiar features. Approximately one quarter of the book is made up of lists, mostly lists of people. The major ones are as follows:

Ezra 1:9–11: list of returned vessels
Ezra 2:1–70: list of returned exiles
Ezra 8:1–14: list of Ezra's companions
Ezra 10:18–44: list of men who separated from foreign wives
Neh 3:1–32: list of builders of the wall
Neh 7:5–72: repeated list of returned exiles
Neh 10:2–29: list of signatories to the pledge
Neh 11:3–36: list of settlers and settlements
Neh 12:1–26: list of cultic personnel
Neh 12:32–42: list of parading members of the community

The prevalence of lists has frequently been used as an argument for unity of Ezra-Nehemiah with Chronicles. E. L. Curtis, for example, mentions fondness for lists and genealogies as the trademark of the Chronicler that is found in both Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah.[9] Such a claim needs to be reexamined. Ezra-Nehemiah, in fact, has but a single, brief genealogy (Neh 12:10–11); the rest are lists and occasional pedigrees (i.e., a line of ascent from the present to the past, such as Ezra's lineage going back to Aaron in Ezra 7).[10] In this sense, Ezra-Nehemiah is already different from Chronicles, where the genealogies (יחוסים), especially in chaps. 1–9, dominate.[11]

At the same time that the lists have been claimed as evidence for *unity* of Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles, the repetition of the list of returnees (Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7) has influenced scholars to *divide* Ezra-Nehemiah itself into two books. The repetition has been understood as a vestige of an

[9] Curtis, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles* (ICC; New York: Scribner, 1910) 4.

[10] See R. R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) for the taxonomy of genealogies.

[11] See also M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of Biblical Genealogies with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969) esp. pp. 69 and 80, on the internal differences between Ezra-Nehemiah's lists and pedigrees and those of Chronicles.

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earlier, separate circulation of Ezra and Nehemiah, preserved by scribes too pious to omit either of these venerable documents.

Such arguments lose much of their power precisely on account of books such as Chronicles. The very existence of Chronicles, with its bold modifications of the sacred traditions, and also the existence of 1 Esdras, should teach us that the ancients were quite willing to tamper with sacred traditions in order to express their distinctive views. The preservation of the two lists, therefore, must point to something else. In what follows I shall suggest what that "something else" might be.

Literary criteria invite us to look at the lists as a deliberate strategy rather than as a frozen remnant. Even though, as Williamson wisely observes, chapters like Ezra 2—and perforce also Nehemiah 7—"are among the most uninviting portions of the Bible to the modern reader,"[12] they are literarily important. Their prominence compels us to consider their significance to the overall intention and message of the book.

In order to understand that overall intention, we will explore the nature and function of the repeated list of returnees, Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7. The lists of returnees, in terms of content, focus on the people and record the people according to class, families, geography, and numbers, and occasionally according to profession. The lists include a wide range of categories of persons who now form the people of Israel and who have returned to their home. Heading the lists are eleven and/or twelve men, their number presumably reflecting a new configuration in order to retain symbolically the traditional twelve-tribe division. The parallels between the lists are so great that we can call them a repetition, their divergence notable mostly at the concluding sections (Ezra 2:68–69; cf. Neh 7:70–71).

R. W. Klein's meticulous study of the lists analyzes the text of the lists and their relation to each other (and to 1 Esdras), aspects which I need not recount here.[13]

The setting of the lists and their original purpose have been explored as well.[14] There appears to be a consensus that each of the lists is a

[12] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 38.

[13] Klein, "Old Readings in 1 Esdras: The List of Returnees from Babylon (Ezra 2/Nehemiah 7)," *HTR* 62 (1969) 99–107.

[14] C. C. Torrey assumes that the lists are fictitious (*Ezra Studies* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910] 250). W. Rudolph thinks that the lists are genuine but composed of different records between the years 539–515 (*Esra und Nehemia* [HAT 20; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1949] 17). According to A. Alt, Zerubbabel compiled the list in order to legitimate land rights ("Die Rolle Samarias bei der Entstehung des Judentums," in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* [Munich: Beck, 1953] II, 316–18). For G. Hölscher, this is a tax list drawn by the Persians ("Die Bücher Esra und Nehemia," in *Die heilige Schrift des Alten Testamentes* (ed. E. Kautzsch; 4th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1923] 504). K. Galling sees the controversy between Samaria and Judah as the background for the list. It is drawn to demonstrate the right and ability of the Judeans to rebuild the Temple and resettle the land (cf. Tattenai's request for names in Ezra 5:10). The list makes clear both the legal and ecclesiastical structure of the community ("The 'Gola List' According to Ezra 2/Nehemiah 7," *JBL* 70 [1951] 153–54).

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composite.[15] Social and political, as well as economic, concerns most likely lurked in the background and explain their origin.[16]

Whatever the original sense, one must nevertheless still ponder the role of the repetition of the list in the book's final form. This concern is all the more relevant when we take into account the fact that Ezra 1–6, according to Japhet and Williamson, constitutes the latest stratum of the book.[17] The repetition is therefore not simply the product of an unyielding respect for sources but a voluntary and thus presumably deliberate act of the author/compiler. Williamson raises the question from a canonical perspective,[18] but relies on A. H. J. Gunneweg's limited answer, namely, the reiteration that the purified community is the same as the community which had first returned and undertook the building of the Temple.[19] This explanation is probable but insufficient.[20]

A full study of the repetition of the lists in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 requires some discussion of the ways repetitions function in narrative. For scholars who rely on source criticism, repetitions most often signal insertions; they frequently become occasions for dissecting the text and distributing its components to different sources. This approach characterizes most studies of Ezra-Nehemiah, even when undertaken by scholars who have applied new literary tools to other biblical works. As a result, as noted earlier, Ezra-Nehemiah's most outstanding repetition typically turns into evidence for the initial independence of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. S. Talmon sums up a representative view: "If indeed Ezra and Nehemiah at one time were two separate works written by different authors, this could help in explaining the duplication of some events and the literary units in both, such as the list of returning exiles (Ezra 2–Nehemiah 7)."[21]

[15] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 28–29

[16] Carl Schultz, for example, connects the list with the rejection of the adversaries' building participation: "Clearly the builders of a temple had a monopoly, and in the case of the Jerusalem temple it was composed of the returning exiles. No outside assistance was allowed or wanted. Even as in the Craftsmen's Charter, so in the Golah list ancestry is traced, frequently in terms of skill" ("The Political Tensions Reflected in Ezra-Nehemiah," in *Scripture in Context* [ed. C. D. Evans, W. W. Hallo, and J. B. White; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1980] 227). The returnees alone had a monopoly; others may not be included. Schultz bases his work on David E. Weisberg's study of ancient guilds (*Guild Structure and Political Allegiance in Early Achamenid Mesopotamia* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967] 1–4), which attests to building monopolies and rights concerning sanctuaries.

[17] S. Japhet, "Biblical Historiography in the Persian Period," 128; H. G. M. Williamson, "The Composition of Ezra i-vi," *JTS* ns 34 (1983) 1–30.

[18] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 269.

[19] Ibid., 269. Cf. Gunneweg, "Zur Interpretation der Bücher Esra-Nehemia," in *Congress Volume: Vienna, 1980* (VTSup 32; Leiden, Brill, 1980) 156.

[20] See below, my third function of the repetition.

[21] Talmon, "Ezra and Nehemiah (Books and Men)," *IDBSup* 318. Elsewhere historical and textual questions and implications preeminently occupy discussions of these lists. See, for example, Galling, "The 'Gola List,'" 149–58; and Klein, "Old Readings in 1 Esdras."

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According to contemporary literary criticism, however, repetitions are significant vehicles for the text's intention. Literary studies confirm and amply demonstrate the ingenious and sophisticated use of repetition in biblical narrative to convey meaning.[22] As Adele Berlin notes, repetition "is one of the most extensive devices in the Bible, taking many different forms. . . . It should not be mistaken for ancient redundancy, or even as simply an esthetic device. It is a key to perception, to interpretation."[23] Since repetition in literature serves no single function,[24] one cannot apply an automatic or mechanical interpretation to this particular repetition. Instead, specific meanings have to be teased out on the basis of patterns found elsewhere. It should be clear, however, that the lists, by virtue of being an overt and major repetition, are important as a distinctive *literary* strategy. They articulate, thereby, something central to the book as a whole. Our task is to determine what this might be. I identify at least six important points that the repetition of the lists articulates.

First, structurally speaking, repetition as an *inclusio* unifies material.[25] *Inclusio* and chiasm are major devices for defining units in ancient literature. As H. Van Dyke Parunak observes, "An inclusio is a three-membered (A B A) chiasm whose outer members are short, compared with the center member."[26] As an *inclusio*, as well as a chiasm, repetition signals conclusion of a unit.[27] The weighty repetition of the lists in Ezra-Nehemiah, as a literary technique, defines the structure of the narrative. It establishes boundaries and compresses all the material that has been "bracketed" within the repetition. The repetition of the list frames the intervening material, binding it more closely together, forming a unit from Ezra 2 to Nehemiah 7.

The section thus formed is the longest in the book. It is the heart of the book and its central event. We can discern three distinct subunits or stories within this largest section. Each story contains a specific cast of characters

[22] See Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 88–113; Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 365–440; S. Talmon, "Presentation of Synchroneity and Simultaneity in Biblical Narrative," in *Studies in Hebrew Narrative Art Throughout the Ages* (ed. J. Heinemann and S. Werses; ScrHier 27; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978) 9–26.

[23] Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 136.

[24] See J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982) esp. pp. 1–21. See also Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 365–440.

[25] See H. Van Dyke Parunak, "Oral Typesetting: Some Uses of Biblical Structure," *Bib* 62 (1981) esp. p. 158 n. 8. Parunak adds in n. 9: "The notion of the inclusio as a segmenting device has been discussed extensively in the literature. The more important works are listed in B. Porten, 'The Structure and Theme of the Solomon Narrative (I Kings 3–11),' *HUCA* 38 (1967) 94 note 2."

[26] Ibid., 158.

[27] Ibid., 158; see also p. 168. Parunak calls attention to the fact that repetition can not only mark a unit but also indicate secondary material (158–61). He therefore distinguishes between what he calls internal and external *inclusios* and develops guidelines for differentiating between the two. Ezra 2 through Nehemiah 7 clearly fits the definition of demarcated unit rather than peripheral material.

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and a clear task with complication and resolution. The first story tells of the building of the Temple by the returnees, with Zerubbabel and Jeshua. The second describes the return of Ezra and the children of exile who build up the community according to the Torah. The third recounts the adventures of Nehemiah and the Judeans who build the wall.[28]

These three sections, typically understood as mere succession despite some chronological disarray, are firmly clamped together in Ezra-Nehemiah by the repetition. The repetition of the list indicates that these diverse stories finally constitute a single major event: the building of God's house by the people of God in accordance with a decree (see Cyrus's declaration).

For Ezra-Nehemiah, the house of God is not simply the Temple but rather comes to encompass the city as a whole.[29] The repetition of the list is one of several ways that Ezra-Nehemiah expresses this idea. The list confirms formally and structurally what Ezra 6:14 expresses thematically, namely, that building the house of God extended over a long period, spanning the reigns of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, whose decrees sustained these activities.

The repetition allows us to discern the shape of Ezra-Nehemiah, making what precedes into an introduction and what follows into a conclusion. This observation leads to the following overall structure of Ezra-Nehemiah:

I. An introduction which sets an agenda: Cyrus's decree calls God's people to build the house of God in Jerusalem (1:1–1:4)
II. The actualization of the decree in Ezra 2–Nehemiah 7 or Ezra 1:5–Neh 7:72 (see below for the more precise boundaries)
III. The celebration of success: God's people celebrate and dedicate the house of God (Nehemiah 8–13).

Because Ezra 2 through Nehemiah 7 constitutes ultimately a single event, the grand celebration does not take place after the completion of the Temple in Ezra 6 but awaits and comes only after the completion of the whole project. At that time the completed house of God, Temple, people, walls, are sanctified (Neh 12:30). Hence, according to Ezra-Nehemiah's structure, all of these developments between Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 are necessary elements of the full realization of Cyrus's decree. Only when they have been executed can the great fanfare of the dedication proper take place. Nehemiah 8–13 is that dedication. The repetition of the list is thus the key to Ezra-Nehemiah's structure. This may constitute its first and foremost significance.

Second, repetition indicates emphasis. Repetitions most frequently occur in order to stress something important. Biblical narrative, as well as

[28] For a detailed structure of the subunits, see T. C. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (SBLMS 36; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) esp. chapter 3, pp. 37–126.

[29] Ibid., 37–126.

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other ancient and modern literature, characteristically repeats ideas, information, or phrases that are significant (note the repeated stories of creation and the Ten Commandments, etc.). In Ezra-Nehemiah, the repetition then emphasizes the significance of the persons named in the lists. The repetition keeps numerous persons and names firmly before the readers' eyes, drawing attention to the multitude that constitutes the people of Israel. Josephus, as *via negativa*, helps us appreciate the import of the lists and of their repetition. His own account of the return omits the list of returnees with the following rationale: "But I have thought it better not to give a list of the names of the families lest I distract the minds of my readers from the connexion of events and make the narrative difficult for them to follow" (*Ant.* 11.3.10 §68).

The difference from Ezra-Nehemiah could not be more telling. Josephus, in his rush to continue the main story line, refuses to linger on what for him comprise the less important details, that is, the lists. Ezra-Nehemiah, however, keeps the readers' mind *precisely* on such lists because they are the bearers of the narrative line. It is the names in this duplicated list (and other such lists) that disclose the characters whose adventures are recounted. For Ezra-Nehemiah, the people, not simply their illustrious leaders, are the main characters in the book. By repeating, the book underscores this point, emphasizing the role of the people as a whole.

Third, as an emphasis on the people as a whole, the list also expresses Ezra-Nehemiah's view of the wholeness of the people. Chronicles, by way of contrast, assumes the twelve-tribe schema for Israel even after the demise of the northern kingdom. Consequently, Chronicles includes members of the northern tribes in the return (e.g., 1 Chr 9:3). Ezra-Nehemiah offers a different notion of who Israel is. For Ezra-Nehemiah, as Japhet, for example, has shown, only the returned exiles now constitute Israel.[30] These comprise the Judeans, Benjaminites, priests, and Levites (Ezra 1:5). By enumerating the composition of the people twice, Ezra-Nehemiah stresses the nature of this reconstituted community.

Fourth, the repetition bridges past and present. Talmon has shown that resumptive repetition can convey contemporaneity of events.[31] Something akin to this happens here. The repetition of Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 links people and events of the past with those in the present. Nehemiah 7 literally brings the earlier returnees into the present and combines them as participants in the subsequent event(s): namely, celebration and dedication. All that transpired between the "brackets" (i.e., the two lists) now joins with what follows. The structure suggests that all the groups have had a specific role in

[30] Japhet, "People and Land in the Restoration Period," in *Das Land Israel in biblischer Zeit* (ed. N. Kamp and G. Strecker; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983) 112–18; so too Williamson (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, 32) who ties it in with the exodus (see below).

[31] Talmon, "The Presentation of Synchroneity and Simultaneity in Biblical Narrative," esp. p. 17.

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the "process of actualization." All the people thereby gather together to celebrate "success." Just as the later rabbis saw "all Israel" standing at Sinai, including all those who followed since Moses, so Ezra-Nehemiah, by repeating Ezra 2 in Nehemiah 7, makes all those who preceded take part in the ensuing celebration of the reading of the Torah and the dedication of the walls, that is, in the completion of the house of God and its dedication. Celebration waits until such conjoining takes place. The list at this juncture not only stresses the importance of the people as a whole but also unites them in time and place.

Fifth, the repetition suggests the broadening of communal participation. This meaning can be gathered from looking at differences in details, since repetition sometimes draws attention to important differences by establishing an initial commonality followed by variations.[32] One detects within the lists slight differences in names and numbers which are most easily explained as textual corruptions.[33] The more obvious difference concerns the reports of the initial activities in the land (Ezra 2:68–69; Neh 7:69–71). These differences include variant details of who did what, and who contributed what. The amount of contributions differs. The most dramatic differences are the priests' garments and gold darics.[34] As for the contributors, Ezra 2 mentions only "some of the heads of families" (Ezra 2:68), whereas Nehemiah 7 mentions the heads of the ancestors' houses, the governor, but also "*the rest of the people*" (Neh 7:71). The rest of the people contribute as much as the heads of the houses and much more than the governor.[35] Galling explains these variations on the basis of historical issues, whereas Japhet grounds them in ideology.[36] From our perspective, one may conclude that the differences cited express in Nehemiah 7 the broader participation of the populace in the task of building.[37] Not only are the leaders involved, but the people as a whole make substantial contribution.

Sixth, and more speculative, interpretation of the repetition implies that the list sets equivalencies between Torah reading and sacrifices. This interpretation is based on the recognition that repetitions establish at times analogies, equivalencies, or substitutions between those things that follow, to

[32] See Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 76–79.

[33] See Klein, "Old Readings in 1 Esdras."

[34] There are 597 priestly garments in Nehemiah 7, against 100 in Ezra 2; 41,000 gold darics in Nehemiah 7 against 61,000 in Ezra 2.

[35] Unless the priestly garments were valued in 10,000 gold darics (which seems unlikely), the governor's contribution is the smallest. That of the heads of the ancestors' houses and that of the rest of the people appear to be comparable. The numbers themselves are large and imply a great deal of wealth being contributed to the project.

[36] Galling, "The 'Gola List' According to Ezra 2/Nehemiah 7"; Japhet, "People and Land in the Restoration Period," 112, 123 n. 46.

[37] See D. J. A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 60–61 for an interesting attempt to reconcile these numbers.

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which the repetition points.[38] Ezra 2 immediately leads to the building of the altar and to worship. Nehemiah 7 directly leads to the ceremony of the reading of the Torah. This arrangement suggests a relation between altar building and Torah reading. One could postulate that here we find an earlier version of a view that later becomes normative, that is, that the study of Torah replaces the offering of sacrifices. Such a conclusion is attractive all the more when one notes how rare and briskly reported are the sacrifices in Ezra-Nehemiah, especially after Nehemiah 8. The idea is indirectly supported by the location of the reading of the Torah in Nehemiah 8. As H. L. Ellison has suggested, "In the choice of site we have Ezra's deliberate proclamation that the Torah was greater than the Temple and its sacrifices, indeed that the Torah as such was above anything it might contain."[39] This use of the repetition to replace cult with Torah is too subtle, however, to constitute a major focus. At best one can argue for a beginning of such analogies and possible shift in cultic orientation which later generations utilized.

We have looked at what the lists accomplish as repetition. They bind the intervening material together, leading to the conclusion that what is embraced within the brackets belongs together and articulating several compounded meanings.

II

We now turn to the larger context, looking at what precedes and what follows each of these lists in order to discern the book's pattern with greater precision. We need to examine the context where the first list (Ezra 2) appears and then the context where the second list (Nehemiah 7) ends. First we must ask whether the unit begins with the list itself in Ezra 2 or at an earlier point. This involves determining the place of Ezra 1:5–11, the report of the return and the list of vessels returned by Cyrus. Three possibilities typically have been proposed concerning 1:5–11. (1) It is common to divide the passage into two segments: Ezra 1:5–6 and 1:7–11. Ezra 1:5–6 has been considered a part of the introduction together with Cyrus's decree (Ezra 1:1–4), whereas 1:7–11 has been linked with the list of Ezra 2 (so most commentaries). (2) Ezra 1:5–11 as a whole has been included as part of the introduction, Ezra 1:1–4.[40] (3) Ezra 1:5–11 has been attached

[38] See, e.g., Sternberg's discussion "Repetition with Variation: Forms and Functions of Deviance," in *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 390–93.

[39] H. L. Ellison, *From Babylon to Bethlehem* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979) 47.

[40] So Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*. Williamson combines Ezra 1:5–11 with Cyrus's decree because he finds the theme of the return as the new exodus unifying the whole passage. According to Williamson, these verses, which build upon an available list, are "a highly charged theological interpretation" of the sources of 1:1–4 and 1:9–10 (p. 8). Several elements develop the decree and the list to articulate the exodus motif. The language recalls the despoiling of the Egyptians (cf. Exod 3:21–22) (p. 16); the specific references to vessels also connect these passages of Exodus with Ezra 1:5–11 (and also with Isa 52:11–12). Even the reference to *Nasi*

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to the list of returnees and joined with Ezra 2.

I suggest that the third possibility is the best, but I intend to develop it further and show how Ezra 1:5–11 is connected to what follows. Like most narratives, Ezra-Nehemiah is a story.[41] The basic components of story can be delineated as follows: (I) Potentiality (objective defined); (II) Process of Actualization; (III) Success (objective reached).[42] This is the structure which the repetition of the lists (Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7) indicates.

Cyrus's decree (Ezra 1:1–4) by itself forms the first part of the book, standing as a separate introductory unit. This unit sets up the agenda for the book by declaring what God and Cyrus have decreed. The material within the repeated lists depicts the actualization of the decree in three stages. However, this process of actualization is first introduced by a proleptic summary, Ezra 1:5–6. As a proleptic summary, these verses state in an embryonic fashion what Ezra 1:7–Neh 7:72 elaborates in detail. They announce the fulfillment of Cyrus's decree. As the decree had summoned a people to go up and build the house of God in Jerusalem which is in Judah (Ezra 1:1–4), Ezra 1:5–6 reports that a community rose up promptly to execute this decree, going up to build.

The structure of this proleptic summary essentially parallels the decree, stressing thereby the close correspondence between the decree and its fulfillment. The jussives "let him go up" (ויעל) and "let him build" (ויבן) in Cyrus's edict (Ezra 1:3) become the infinitives "to go up" (לעלות) and "to build" (לבנות) in the people's response (Ezra 1:5). The exhortation to neighbors to support the returnees with freewill gifts of silver, gold, goods, and livestock (Ezra 1:4) is matched by the report that the neighbors strengthened the returnees with silver, gold, goods, and livestock (Ezra 1:6).

This introduction specifies that "the people" comprise the heads of ancestors' houses of Judah and Benjamin,[43] priests and Levites and every one (לכל) who had been stirred up by God. All of these people are the central subject of Ezra-Nehemiah. What will follow is their story.

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contributes to this. The journey itself parallels that of the wilderness, where, according to Num 2:3–31; 7:11–83, we find lists of princes of various tribes (as well as references to donated vessels in Num 7:84–86) (p. 18). The final sentence, Ezra 1:11, uses the passive of רעלה, "were brought up," deliberately to echo, e.g., Exod 33:1 (p. 19). It seems to me that these allusions are suggestive but too subtle to constitute a major theme of the passage.

[41] Story in this sense is not a genre definition but a description of one of the three constitutive elements of narrative (see S. Rimmon-Kenen, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* [London: Methuen, 1983] 3). This use of story is to be differentiated from that of B. O. Long, for example, for whom it designates a specific genre (see B. O. Long, *1 Kings with an Introduction to the Historical Books* [Forms of Old Testament Literature, 9; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984] esp. pp. 30–31 and 261).

[42] I owe the terminology to C. Bremonds's definition of the components of "story." See S. Rimmon-Kenen, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 22.

[43] For details of the meaning of this category, see J. P. Weinberg, "Das *beit 'ābōt* im 6.-4. JH V.U.Z.," *VT* 23 (1973) 400–414.

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As God had stirred up the spirit of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1), so does God stir up the spirit of the returnees (Ezra 1:5). The parallel confirms that the response by the community to the decree is prompted by the same divine power responsible for the decree itself, reiterating the connection between decree and fulfillment. In addition, as the proleptic summary of the process of actualization, this repetition consigns all subsequent events in Ezra 1:5–Neh 7:72 to the workings of the same divine initiative.

The decree is fully actualized by three movements: each involves a beginning in Diaspora with the transfer of material from the Persian king to the returned exiles (see, e.g., Ezra 7:12–26, esp. 16). For this reason it seems best to understand the list of vessels which Cyrus transfers to the returnees as the introduction to the first movement rather than as a conclusion of the previous section. Given this understanding, the structure of Ezra-Nehemiah can be described as follows:

I. Potentiality (objective defined): decree to the community to build the house of God (Ezra 1:1–4)
II. Process of actualization: the community builds the house of God according to decree (1:5–Neh 7:72)
   A. Introduction: proleptic summary (Ezra 1:5–6)
   B. First movement: the returnees build the altar and the Temple according to the decree and the Torah (1:7–6:22)
   C. Second movement: Ezra and the exiles build the community according to the Torah (Ezra 7:1–10:40)
   D. Third movement: Nehemiah and the Judeans build the wall (Neh 1:1–7:5)
   E. Recapitualtion: list of returnees (Neh 7:6–72)
III. Success (objective reached): the community dedicates the house of God according to Torah (Neh 8:1–13:31).

We turn now to the context of the concluding list, Nehemiah 7. Traditional assessment of Nehemiah 7's relation to its context usually focuses on questions of priority vis-à-vis Ezra 2. Some scholars argue that the seemingly tight connection of Nehemiah 7 with what follows shows that Nehemiah 7 is prior to Ezra 2.[44] Others (e.g., U. Kellermann) argue for a closer integrity of Ezra 2 with its context and grant, therefore, priority to Ezra 2.[45]

Such inconclusive debates, which mix historical and literary questions, serve to illustrate the complexities and ambiguities in the text. They reveal, in this particular case, that both Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 are in some respects well integrated into their respective contexts and that, in others, they stand apart from their surrounding.

[44] See Clines, for example (*Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 44–45).

[45] See U. Kellermann, *Nehemia: Quellen, Überlieferung und Geschichte* (BZAW 102; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967) 25.

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The list in Nehemiah 7 is particularly perplexing, although its beginning is clear. Nehemiah reports: "And I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first, and I found written in it" (Neh 7:5). The phrase, "and I found written in it" [ואמצא כתוב בו] is an *un*ambiguous clue that what follows is a quoted document. The conclusion of the quotation, however, is obscure. There are no indications that one thing has ended and another one has begun. As a result, scholars break the units in different ways.

No formulaic language or any other literary markings indicate the conclusion of the unit. The last identified speaker/writer was Nehemiah (Neh 7:5). One would have expected him to resume once his quotation concluded, possibly in Neh 7:72. Yet it is not self-evident where the list does conclude. One cannot immediately determine whether the report about the gathering on the first day of the first month in Neh 8:1 belongs still to the document which Nehemiah introduced and quoted or whether it is a resumption of Nehemiah's own memoirs. Only further reading yields the necessary conclusion that *neither* is the case. The reference to Ezra in Neh 8:2 indicates that the scene belongs to a time later than the first return and therefore in the reign of Artaxerxes, wherein all subsequent events transpire.[46] This confirms the view that Nehemiah's quotation of the older document had come to conclusion at an earlier point.[47] The reference to Nehemiah in the third person (Neh 8:9), however artificial, indicates that he is no longer the narrator. Consequently, it is clear that a definite transition occurs between Nehemiah 7 and 8, but the exact location of that transition remains unclear. The customary scholarly designation of Nehemiah 8 as part of the Ezra material acknowledges the transition.[48]

What is striking here is the remarkable *seamlessness* of this particular transition. Such seamlessness is all the more astonishing in a book so rife with obvious seams. It is at this juncture that "confluence" appears as the most apt description. A probable explanation of this peculiar confluence of the texts —peculiar all the more in view of Ezra-Nehemiah's rough transitions

[46] The exact date is obscure. If Neh 7:72b belongs to the subsequent assembly, then the date appears to be the seventh month of the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (see Neh 6:15). But Nehemiah 13 frustrates the attempt to accept this date by its repeated references to "that day," which refer, in their present context, to the celebration of the dedication of the walls. It also mentions, however, Nehemiah's activities after his return at least twelve years later (Neh 13:6). Perhaps all that we can conclude from this is that the book is not interested in ascertaining this date in its vertical dimension but prefers to focus on the cyclical dimension of the ritual season.

[47] One might seek to argue that Nehemiah has resumed his memoirs somewhere before Neh 8:2. However, the reference to Nehemiah in the third person (Neh 8:9) implies that the depicted episode in Neh 8:2–12 cannot be an entry in Nehemiah's memoirs.

[48] The arrangement in 1 Esdras, where the parallels to Nehemiah 8 follow the parallel to Ezra 10, indicates to many scholars that Nehemiah 8 has been dislodged from its original position, which was initially after Ezra 10. See K.-F. Pohlmann, *Studien zum dritten Esra* (FRLANT 104; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970) 127–43, for a thorough discussion of this point; cf. Williamson's critique in *Israel in the Books of Chronicles*, 22–25.

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elsewhere—is that it expresses syntactically what is also expressed through the repetition: the flowing together of persons and events embraced in the preceding section into the present event of Nehemiah 8–13. Like a funnel, Nehemiah 7 channels persons and events from Ezra 2 through Nehemiah 7 into the final celebration which comes next to conclude the book.

It is no mere accident therefore that Neh 8:1 reports, for the first time in Ezra-Nehemiah, that "*all* the people gathered as *one*." This "all . . . as one" indicates the efforts and participation of all who preceded, all of whom are embraced within the repeated lists and join in the celebration.

The main results may be summarized as follows: The repetition of the list of returnees defines the shape of the book and articulates several important ideas. The shape is a tightly constructed book with an objective defined in Cyrus's decree, actualized in Ezra 1:5—Nehemiah 7:72, and celebrated in Nehemiah 8–13. A repeated emphasis is given to the people as a whole.

III

The other lists in Ezra-Nehemiah continue to restate the importance of the people as a whole. Their strategic placement shows that each act, from the building of the Temple to the final celebration, is performed by many individuals whose names and number literally and literarily at times submerge those of the leaders (see, for example, the climactic encircling parade of Neh 12:32–42 in which Ezra and Nehemiah are virtually "lost" to the reader in the crowd). The message is thus clear: the people are the important ones. The people "go up" and the people "build"—as Cyrus and the Lord have commanded. The additional list in Ezra 8 reiterates another "going up." The list of builders (Nehemiah 3) spells out who were the numerous participants responsible for restoring the wall. The pledge to the Torah and to the house of God comes with a long list of signatures (Neh 10:2–29). The list of settlers and settlements (Neh 11:3–36) continues to keep diverse persons before the readers' eyes. Each and every important event in the book has its list of participants to indicate that the activities were not the actions of famous individuals but included the less known members of the society. In many respects, Ezra-Nehemiah's account of the restoration is analogous to the Vietnam War Memorial: events are recalled by commemorating the names of many who have been otherwise lost to the communal memory. This can be contrasted with another form of remembering, reflected in our culture by the Washington Monument, which celebrates the great hero. Such heroic mentality characterizes Josephus's and 1 Esdras's accounts of the return and restoration of postexilic Israel, where great men, such as Zerubbabel, remain in the limelight.[49] For Ezra-Nehemiah, glory goes to the countless people

[49] For the specific focus of 1 Esdras, see my article, "The Chronicler and the Composition of 1 Esdras," *CBQ* 48 (1986) 39–61.

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who actually shaped the details of the events, not simply to their leaders. The book painstakingly insists that future generations recognize the communal participation in the re-creation of the nation's life.

The use of one particular list in Neh 12:1–26 provides a final clue to the structure of the book and its independence from Chronicles. This list of cultic personnel is situated in the last major unit of the book, Nehemiah 8–13, wherein the celebration of the fulfillment of the decree and the dedication of the house of God take place. Before it come several ceremonies (Nehemiah 8–10), after it comes the grand finale of Neh 12:27–13:3. Between the ceremonies themselves and the grand finale we find the lists of Neh 11:1–12:26.

These lists, like the repetition of Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 weave characters together in relation through time and space. Thus Nehemiah 11 links people and land, whereas Nehemiah 12 braids the present day with the beginning of the book, recording the network of cult personnel that spans the unified era. The point to note is that the era it unifies is from Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Neh 12:1) to Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh 12:26).

The list of cultic personnel in Neh 12:1–26 provides closure, tying together the loose ends of the tapestry. As the book comes to an end, Neh 12:1–26 explicitly retraces these threads back to Ezra 2:1, recapitulating lines of cultic personnel back to those who came up in the first wave of return.[50] The network of priests and Levites unifies the earlier and later periods into a single, continuous event: the actualization of Cyrus's edict. Having begun in the days of Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Neh 12:1; cf. Ezra 2:1), the list concludes with "in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priest the scribe" (Neh 12:26). This articulates, as did the repetition of the lists, the oneness of the intervening generations and activities.

The lists of priests and Levites in Neh 12:1–26 pose many historical and textual problems that have remained unresolved.[51] As Williamson has shown, there is no relation between these priestly lists and the priestly courses in 1 Chr 24:1–18.[52] From a literary perspective it is important to note the book's

[50] Note Neh 12:1: "These are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Amariah, Malluch, Hattush. . . ."

[51] See J. M. Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (AB 14; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965) 196, for a good discussion of some major problems. Prominent among them is the near repetition of many of the names. The list of the earliest priests (Neh 12:1–7) is suspiciously like the list of the later priests (Neh 12:12–21). W. Rudolph has suggested that the compiler had in his possession lists of priests for the time of Joiakim (Neh 12:12–21) but not for the earlier time. Lacking one for the earlier era, he simply copied material from the available list (*Esra und Nehemia*, 196). This is not implausible. See, however, C. Fensham's cautionary remarks, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 252.

[52] Williamson writes that the study of the list in N 12 ". . . should remove any lingering temptation to compare this list with the twenty-four priestly courses known from 1 Chr 24:7–18 and later times; neither names nor numbers are now even remotely similar. The added six names, however, mark a clear step in that direction" (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, 360–61).

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concern with recapitulating the era through such lists, however awkward this proves to be.[53]

The fact that the concluding recapitulation links the conclusion to the beginning of Ezra-Nehemiah itself, and not to some events in Chronicles, shows that Ezra-Nehemiah is a self-standing book and not the continuation of Chronicles. Nehemiah 12 thus confirms the structure of Ezra-Nehemiah which the repetition of the list defined; it thus helps illustrate the integrity of the book. Most of all, Neh 12:1–26 serves to sever Ezra-Nehemiah from a relation to Chronicles by showing that this book's conclusion returns to its beginning.

All these lists in Ezra-Nehemiah, recounting past figures and linking them in the present, establish the harmonious whole which is the restored community. Together they set the stage for the communal celebration of the completed task. The united community, a community whose many members Ezra-Nehemiah's extensive lists diligently honor, is now ready to meet the new day with unmitigated joy (Neh 12:43).[54] Cyrus's decree has at last been fulfilled.

[53] The lists demonstrate that Ezra-Nehemiah is committed to describing the links in terms of numerous people who hold the events together, even if this means tampering with priestly lists.

[54] Note the fivefold repetition of the root שמח, "rejoice," in Neh 12:43.

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